

Press Conference

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DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE PRESS CONFERENCE

CIA Headquarters Auditorium

19 November 1975

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Mr. Colby: I want to thank you all for coming out here to listen to me express my concern over the possible inclusion of a number of names of Americans and CIA employees and others in the report that the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence is apparently going to release tomorrow. I am particularly concerned about this, and I must say that my concern was shared by at least one of the individuals named because such a release does pose the potential for a retaliation, either against the physical safety, or the livelihood or the families of some of the individuals involved. Such retaliation could come either from people who thought that they were affected by some of the activities in the past or it could come from some of the unstable or extremist groups, either domestic or foreign, who might feel called upon to take some such action against these people. I am concerned because the testimony given in the Senate Committee was given with my full endorsement and support. We waived the secrecy agreements that applied to our employees. For example, we provided large amounts of documentation to the Senate Committee so that they would be fully informed on these

events. The people who did testify, I believe in good faith, anticipated that their executive session testimony would not be followed by their exposure for their individual activities. I am concerned that there be some feeling that there be an obligation to reveal these activities because there is some disapproval of them. This disapproval, of course, is shared by many of us. The President has expressed his clear policy against any such activity. I have issued directives in this Agency two years ago which clearly prohibit any involvement in assassination activity, so there's really no question about whether this is good or bad. It is bad. The real question is whether we will impose an extra legal retaliation on people who at one time did what the general consensus of the people and the command structure around them thought was appropriate at the time. I believe that, if there is disapproval of these activities, there are vehicles by which we can take steps to ensure that they do not recur. There are also vehicles by which any particular punishment could be meted out according to the law, but I think that the extra legal, ex post facto exposure of our people to hostile and irrational retaliation is not within the tradition of our country and, certainly, is too much to expect of people who voluntarily accepted the limitations of lives

of anonymity and service to their country in the intelligence business. I think one particular thing that concerns me is the Committee rule on this subject which says that any individual who believes himself in some way affected by some statements within a hearing or other testimony will have a right to express his feelings directly. Because of the classification of this material and the fact that most of it has been given in executive session, of course, most of these individuals do not know what is being said about them, and, therefore, there is in essence, a lack of due process in their inability to contest the phrases and comments made about them because they do not know what they are. I do not know what they are. The Senate Committee did invite an officer from this Agency, along with the two other agencies, to review the draft report. He found there, the one that worked for this Agency, found therein a number of names. We have sought, and I'm very happy to state, received the acquiescence of the Committee to eliminate a goodly number of these names, but we have not eliminated all of them. Some of them are Americans who are in CIA; some of them are Americans who collaborated with CIA; some are foreign. I think that it is obviously important to them, but it is also obviously important for the future of intelligence in America if we demonstrate that we refused to protect the secret arrangements that we must

make, if we are to carry on effective intelligence operations in the future. With that, perhaps I could have any questions.

QUESTION: Senator Church has surmised that your intervention at this point is aimed at delaying the issuance of the entire report. Could you address yourself to that?

Mr. Colby: No, my position, of course, has long been that this is a subject which should not be the subject of official, formal, public release, or official statements. I've made that point to Senator Church and others many times. But, I am calling this... I am concerned today for something beyond that, which is merely the safety and livelihood of individuals being involved and the future of American intelligence.

QUESTION: How many names are we talking about here? Is it a few names?

Mr. Colby: We're talking about twelve, more or less.

QUESTION : Some of these names that you mentioned...high officials of the CIA whose identities were really already known. In other words, were they kind of semi-public CIA people?

Mr. Colby: Certain of them, I think that there is a justification for anyone such as myself who was confirmed by the Senate to have his name as included, and I would not object to the inclusion of someone who was either publicly elected or who was confirmed in a public manner, but I am

expressing concern about the officers in this Agency

who work here and have worked here for many years. Now, some of these were at the middle level and some were at a senior level, but I think the rule of anonymity certainly applied to their activities during their working years here and that they should be protected in this situation.

QUESTION : Some of the names, of course, of CIA officers are printed in the Congressional Directory, for one thing.

Mr. Colby: Only about two or three, I think...

QUESTION : The Deputy Director of Plans, and so on, are relatively well-known personalities...?

Mr. Colby: There are a few that are named that are well known, but the ones I am particularly concerned about were not ones of that sort.

QUESTION : Mr. Colby, are the twelve names, more or less, that you're talking about...the last remaining names in the category of CIA employees who are not well known were in the report at all?

Mr. Colby: No, the twelve includes the total, but I think, eight or ten of them are people who would meet the standard of being either middle or upper-middle level officials. Now, some of these names have come out and I don't want to dodge the fact that some of them have been in the press, but there is a vast difference, in my mind, between their

appearance in a press story and their official confirmation in a Committee report arrived at after the exhaustive investigation that we have helped the Committee undertake.

QUESTION : Mr. Colby, does the elimination of those twelve names make the report publishable in your eyes?

Mr. Colby: I oppose in principle the publication, but I would not have this press conference if that was the only question involved.

QUESTION : I am confused. You are not here trying a case of secret intelligence sources and methods?

Mr. Colby: Not the legal question.

QUESTION : You are concerned only about the question of possible retaliation?

Mr. Colby: Of people involved, yes.

QUESTION : Mr. Colby, did not the Committee agree already to excise one name?

Mr. Colby: They agreed already to excise a number of names at our request, after one of the individuals brought a legal case, the Committee agreed then to delete his name.

QUESTION : Are you including that one individual in this eight or ten?

Mr. Colby: Well, it is not included now, because it is not going to be included (in the report).

QUESTION : One other question--you've brought into the discussion a phrase "ex post facto". As a lawyer, are you saying

that what they did then was not against any law?

Mr. Colby: I think that that is a subject which could be left to the law and not to retaliation by hostile groups. I think that they, at the time they did it, they did not expect this kind of retaliation and further, I think this is a new approach toward their responsibilities which has been imposed on them by this situation.

QUESTION : Have you received any indication that any hostile group has attempted to harm any of the men whose names . . . ?

Mr. Colby: No, I haven't been in touch with them and I have not received any such indication. But, there are enough unstable people, both in this country and abroad, ah. . . various of us receive threatening phone calls and things of that sort from time to time. We get crank mail here and I think it's perfectly reasonable to anticipate that a number of these people would be subjected to this kind of a threat.

QUESTION : How does the Committee justify its exposure of otherwise obscure people?

Mr. Colby: I think the Committee's approach is to feel that they must give a full history of what happened at these times, and that in order to give this full history, they are giving the names of some of the people involved. I believe that a full history can be given, that firm conclusions can be arrived at, and that any appropriate

change in our rules and regulations can be imposed

without revealing the individual names involved.

QUESTION : How full of history do you think this report is?

Mr. Colby: From what I've heard, it's several hundred pages long, so I imagine there's quite a lot of history. I have not seen it, so I do not know.

QUESTION : The people who went through, for example, and excised certain names...did they indicate to you they thought it was full?

Mr. Colby: They said it was long, and very detailed, obviously in its coverage.

QUESTION : Mr. Colby, in the few top officials that you were talking about earlier, are there any names that you would be willing to see remain in the report?

Mr. Colby: I think I have to take a position that certainly CIA employees should not have their names in there. Certainly, Americans who collaborated with CIA on an understanding of secrecy should not have their names there and foreigners that we worked with abroad should not have their names in there. And, that covers the category that I'm talking about. It does not refer to high politicians and things of that matter.

QUESTION : Mr. Colby, based on the briefing that you've received from past reports, how would you characterize it?

Mr. Colby: I did not go into that. We were invited to send an officer to review it, and the officer did review it, to

look into possible inadvertent exposures of things

that should be secret. That's the extent of the report I got from the individual. He did not describe the whole report to me. I deliberately told him I did not wish him to describe the whole report to me.

QUESTION : How widespread has the distribution of the copy of that report spread within your Agency?

Mr. Colby: It has not been here at all. We went up to the Hill to read it.

QUESTION : Mr. Colby, you've described the possible retaliation from groups that you clearly identify as somewhat irrational and unstable.

Mr. Colby: Or hostile.

QUESTION : Or hostile. So what makes you think that if people's names have already been in the newspapers that they aren't already subject to retaliation? What really is the difference in having it in your report or having it out in the newspapers?

Mr. Colby: There is a difference in the solidity of the allegation. If it is an individual report that appeared in the press at one time, it is an evanescent development, it arouses a certain amount of tension. If it's incorporated in a serious effort to recapitulate history by an organization, such as the Committee which was given full access to all the information, then I think it has a great deal more effect.

QUESTION : I just wonder why you choose the form of a press conference to express your concern.

Mr. Colby: Well, the names are not yet out, and I hope that they will not come out, and I appeal to the people who have responsibility to act on this that they will not come out.

QUESTION : ...the case for the same reasons you're expressing here now...the court case downtown...were there any factors involved in your entering that case?

Mr. Colby: No, this is the only factor. I was asked if I would testify that there was a danger to the individual and I did so testify.

QUESTION : Have you asked the Committee to remove these additional names, and has the Committee refused to do so?

Mr. Colby: I have asked them, yes. I have expressed my concern about these names, both through the officer who read it, and through a letter that I sent separately.

QUESTION : What difference did they draw between the names that they left in and the ones that you say they agree to delete?

Mr. Colby: I think you'd have to ask them their standards for their choice on that.

QUESTION : I'm interested, Sir...to repeat my question a little bit differently...it's still relatively unusual for the Director of Central Intelligence to hold a press

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conference, and I wonder what you thought it might

accomplish that your direct appeal to the Committee
did not?

Mr. Colby: Well, I think to expose what I consider a very serious
matter for American intelligence, and a call to the
responsibility of all of us Americans for the future
of American intelligence.

QUESTION : I understand that the report has already gone to press...
it's too late to do anything now, Sir?

Mr. Colby: I leave that to the workings of the press up there, I
just don't know.

QUESTION : Mr. Colby, are you asking the Senate to work its will
tomorrow in seeking an amended version of the report?

Mr. Colby: I'm only asking and urging that the names be left out
of the report which is publicly distributed.

QUESTION : Mr. Colby, is this the last recourse that you have, or
beyond this public expression, do you have any recourse
left before that report comes out?

Mr. Colby: I do not know whether I have. I certainly will look to
see if there are any. I am under constraints as to what
I can do in this country and I propose to follow those
constraints, if that's what you meant.

QUESTION : Will the White House, do you think, try...do you think
in the secret session of the Senate tomorrow...?

Mr. Colby: No, the President, as you know, did issue a letter a week or so ago expressing his concern about some of these factors as well.

QUESTION : Could that mean (you are) expecting that he would follow up that letter by seeking the cooperation of the Senate?

Mr. Colby: I don't know, ask the White House. I am only speaking as a professional here, concerned about our own people.

QUESTION : Mr. Colby, you describe this report as "extra legal," I believe?

Mr. Colby: No, I'm not saying the report is "extra legal," I said that I do not believe that our people should be exposed to some extra legal retaliation, the action taken against them by somebody else would be extra legal.

QUESTION : You believe the report is legal and proper, it's just that the...?

Mr. Colby: I think it is wrong to include the names in the report.

QUESTION : Mr. Colby, has the Committee behaved in bad faith in this, or would they behave in bad faith if they published these names?

Mr. Colby: I don't want to characterize it in that term. We have worked with the Committee over a long time and we have tried to be responsive to them and give them information, and the Committee, I think, equally, has tried to be responsible about its approach to this investigation. I know they have tried to keep the secrets. They have been

and this is a major point of difference, apparently, between us at the moment as to whether these names should be included.

QUESTION : Irresponsible?

Mr. Colby: No, I wouldn't call it irresponsible. I think it is wrong to expose these names, but I don't think I'd like to put different kinds of adjectives on it.

QUESTION : Mr. Colby, does the White House know that you are making this appeal?

Mr. Colby: Yes.

QUESTION : What sort of actions are attached to these names? What are we talking about--murder, or...?

Mr. Colby: I'm not going to talk about it myself. I haven't read the report itself. I was told by my officer that they were included in there in a fashion which would put them under some threat.

QUESTION : Are they associated with serious crimes?

Mr. Colby: They are associated with their activities in past years, which I think we, many of us, and I, myself, reject today.

QUESTION : Mr. Colby, did the White House suggest that you make this appearance?

Mr. Colby: No, I did.

QUESTION : Mr. Colby, in the past we've had some difficulty drawing you out on the subject of assassinations. Now it appears

that this report will be made public, can I ask you, is it your position in any activities that the CIA became involved in, that they were acting at the direction of the White House? Is that your position-- or will you give a position?

Mr. Colby: I really am not totally informed on that. The Committee has conducted an exhaustive investigation in which they've looked into a lot of things outside of CIA, so I'm sure their knowledge of the whole picture is larger than that available to me, and I believe that the record in CIA is, at best, murky, as to exactly who approved what, when, and that is one of the reasons I've refused to get into a detailed discussion about it. I would refer you to the report when it does come out, as the result of the Committee's investigation into this. Hopefully, without the names.

QUESTION : When you talked with the officer who read the report and briefed you, did he comment along the lines of the question I'm asking regarding the conclusion of the Committee?

Mr. Colby: No, I didn't ask him that. I was only interested in security problems that were involved. That's what we were invited to look at, that was the problem that I felt I was asked by the Senate to make a judgment about, and I did. I was not asked to review the accuracy or non-accuracy of their conclusions, of their assessments, of their detailed reports.

QUESTION : If I could follow up for just a second...I understand that that was the official procedure, but can I ask you--were there no copies within this organization?

Mr. Colby: No, he read it up there. He did not bring any home.

QUESTION : I'm not talking about that particular copy.

Mr. Colby: I know of no other copies, and I'm sure that we have no other copy.

QUESTION : Mr. Colby, would you consider scheduling another such session as this after they proceed (with the report)?

Mr. Colby: Well, I still stand on my disapproval of a discussion of assassination.

QUESTION : Would you disapprove of any subsequent discussion of the report subsequent to its publication?

Mr. Colby: Well, I'd like to read the report to determine the answer to that question. I really don't know.

QUESTION : Will the CIA be asked to provide protection for these people, if, in fact, their names are published?

Mr. Colby: Well, there's very limited protection we can give them in this country. We do not have a police service here, or any such activity. We would certainly help them to the degree we could.

QUESTION : Earlier, when you were talking about hostile groups, you said various of us have received threatening phone calls and mail. Have you personally received threats?

Mr. Colby: Certainly.

QUESTION : Can you tell us anything about them?

Mr. Colby: Well, different kinds of phone calls and crank mail and that sort of thing.

QUESTION : Has there been any effort to do a trace, find out their origins?

Mr. Colby: In certain cases, yes...to find out what the origin of the threat is.

QUESTION : Is there any success in determining the origin?

Mr. Colby: Well, one gentleman kept calling me at a certain time and, like any citizen, I asked the phone company if they could trace the origin of the calls, and after three days, they came back and said they came from a telephone registered in a certain name, and the next day, when he called at 6:00 a.m., or whatever it was, I said, "Mr. So and So," and I've never heard from him again.

QUESTION : Was there any legal action taken against him?

Mr. Colby: I specifically prohibited my people from taking any legal action or any illegal action.

QUESTION : Were there other CIA officials who received similar threats?

Mr. Colby: Various of our people from time to time have received that kind of a threat, yes.

QUESTION : Mr. Colby (...resurrection of past publications with CIA names)?

Mr. Colby: There have been very few of those by official bodies.

QUESTION : (Not Discernible)

Mr. Colby: There have been individuals abroad who have been identified and punished for their association with CIA. Yes, there have been people who have died for working for CIA.

QUESTION : ...because of publication of their names?

Mr. Colby: No, but because of exposure of their work with us.

QUESTION : Mr. Colby, if the Senate decided to instruct the Committee to expunge this dozen names from the report, that would please you, I take it?

Mr. Colby: It would very much please me. It would not overcome my overall disapproval of the publication of this subject, but it would certainly reduce the reason for a press conference such as this.

QUESTION : Mr. Colby, is one of your objectives in holding this news conference ...?

Mr. Colby: I hope that the names will not be published.

QUESTION : Did you send a message to the Senate?

Mr. Colby: I hope the names will not be published.

QUESTION : Mr. Colby, why haven't you asked the President to call Senator Church and ask him personally to take the names out?

Mr. Colby: Because the President has written to him, and I have written him, and I've written to others in the Congress that I appropriately relate to.

QUESTION : Mr. Colby, what I don't understand...in a confrontation you had over classification with the House Intelligence Committee, you took the position that material had been given to them on a classified basis and they simply weren't free to make it public unless you declassified it. Why have you not simply told the Senate Committee they can't release information that you have classified until you let them do it?

Mr. Colby: Because I believe the information from the Rockefeller Commission investigation was sent up there with the statement that it would be handled in a responsible manner by the Senate. There was not a legal position taken at that time.

QUESTION : Senator Church made a point of saying this material was given to them under classification, and what I don't understand is, why you have not taken the stern legal position, either you or the White House, that you took in a similar circumstance over the classification--the last news conference you had was over the matter of unilateral declassification. Why is this not an issue of...?

Mr. Colby: In that case, it was declassified and I said it was wrong at the time, and we later worked out a relationship which avoided that kind of thing happening again.

QUESTION : Mr. Colby, why should a report on assassination plots not be made public?

Mr. Colby: Because I think it can harm our country, and I think that the evidence is not very clear because of the atmosphere in which that kind of activity may have taken place in the 50's and 60's and I see that no benefit to our country is to be gained and considerable loss to our country. CIA has had a very hard time for the last couple of years as a result of a statement of my testimony before one of the Committees, a statement of testimony which was inaccurately stated as CIA engaging in destabilization. That word has become a worldwide word, put in my mouth, although I never said it, and it is that precise example of the kind of thing that I think we will face in the future as hostile services, hostile countries, hostile political groups, delve through the individual allegations, quotations and material that will show in a report on this subject, and will use it against our country for the next number of years.

QUESTION : Do you think it also wrong for Americans to know the extent to which the government did engage in plotting assassinations?

Mr. Colby: No, I think we should share as much information as we can with our citizens, and I think that the expression of overall conclusions and firm recommendations for the future as appropriate for a Committee. I'm really only

arguing about the details of it and, particularly, the names of the people involved.

QUESTION : Could we have the benefit of your views on the report after it's published?

Mr. Colby: Well, that is an answer to an earlier question as to whether I'd have another conference after it's published, and I would have to read it before I could answer that question.

QUESTION : Could we have telephones if you have another press conference?

Mr. Colby: We certainly will try to get in touch with you a little bit sooner than we did today.

QUESTION : No, I mean telephones to file on?

Mr. Colby: We really aren't prepared for a regular press conference situation here.

QUESTION : Mr. Colby, how many names were removed at the CIA's request from the report?

Mr. Colby : Well, of course, a number of names were left out in the original writing of it...names that we provided that were available in the material provided. In the draft, there were a number of names, I think there were around 18 or 20 that were actually removed, so I'd say about two-thirds of the ones we requested were removed, were actually removed.

QUESTION : ...20 out of 30 were removed?

Mr. Colby: Yes, about that number.

QUESTION : Mr. Colby, if you remove all the names from this report, don't you think it impossible for the American public to answer the question, "Who is accountable?" "Who is responsible?"

Mr. Colby: No, I don't think so at all, I think it's very clear, you can merely refer to "a CIA employee." I mean, that's where the accountability problem is, right there. We in CIA have to be responsible for our employees. I don't see that the individual name, Mr. Smith, adds anything to that particular facet.

QUESTION : Sir, did you point out to the Committee that the Watergate Committee, and the House Judiciary Committee did exactly that and left out names and used the term "a CIA employee" or "employee number one?"

Mr. Colby: I did not, but we have discussed that technique over many months with the Senate Committee and the House Committee, and many of the documents we do provide leave names out, but in some of these the name became important to an understanding of the matter, and under classification, and under the understanding that they would not be published, we provided them.

QUESTION : Mr. Colby, moving aside the problem of the specific names, I'm a little puzzled, because from the very beginning you knew there was going to be a report and you knew it was going to be fairly detailed. Senator Church was on

television a lot, telling us how detailed it was going to be, so if you really had objections back then, why didn't you voice them then, or is it that you just don't like what they found out?

Mr. Colby: No, I did voice them then. This has been my standing position ever since the very start. I did voice an objection to a publication on this subject.

QUESTION : Sir, do you hope that people who consume the news to the extent there is news of your appearance here will call their Senators and ask them to take those names out?

Mr. Colby: I think I'll speak and let the people do what they think is their appropriate responsibility under our Constitution.

Thank you very much